



Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome



MAY 13, 2024

CDC's website is being modified to comply with President Trump's Executive Orders.

Diagnosing ME/CFS

KEY POINTS

- There is no test available to specifically screen for ME/CFS.
- Your healthcare provider will start by asking about your symptoms and health history.
- They will also do a physical and mental exam.
- And finally, they will take blood and urine samples from you to rule out other illnesses.



Learning your health history

Your healthcare provider will start with basic questions about your health:

- Have you been diagnosed with any other conditions?
- What medications do you take?
- Have you had prior illnesses or surgeries? If so, what?
- Are you allergic to anything?
- What illnesses have affected your family members in the past?

To better understand whether you may have ME/CFS, your healthcare provider may ask more about your activities and abilities. The questions might include:

- What can you do now? How is it different than before?
- How long have you felt this way?
- Do you feel better after sleeping or resting?
- What makes you feel worse? What helps you feel better?
- What happens when you push to do activities that are now hard for you?
- Are you able to think as clearly as you did before becoming ill?
- What symptoms keep you from doing what you need or want to do?

You may want to keep an activity journal. This could help you remember important details when you see a healthcare provider.

Learning more about your illness

Your healthcare provider might refer you to a specialist to do try to learn more about what's causing your symptoms. Some types of specialists you may see include:

- A neurologist (brain and nervous system doctor)
- A rheumatologist (joint, muscle and bone doctor), or
- A sleep specialist.

These specialists can check for other conditions that can cause similar symptoms similar to ME/CFS. They might also find that you have other conditions that can be treated - either instead of or in addition to ME/CFS. Getting treatment for these other conditions, if you have them, might help you feel better.

You can read more about how healthcare providers diagnose ME/CFS in the [2015 Institute of Medicine report on ME/CFS](#). This report includes the symptoms you must have to be diagnosed with ME/CFS. It also includes symptoms that some people with ME/CFS have, while others don't.

Resources

Could You Have ME/CFS? (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome)

ME/CFS is a complex illness and symptoms of ME/CFS may seem similar to many other illnesses. ME/CFS requires **three** symptoms:

1

Not being able to participate in routine activities that were possible before becoming ill, such as work, school, social life, and/or personal life, that:

- Lasts for more than **6 months**
- Is accompanied by **fatigue** that is:
 - Often serious
 - Just started (not lifelong)
 - Not the result of ongoing activities
 - Not from more than usual effort
 - Not made better by rest

2

Post-exertional malaise (PEM). Worsening of symptoms after physical, mental, or emotional effort that would not have caused a problem before the illness. This is sometimes referred to as "crashing" by people with ME/CFS.

3

Unrefreshing sleep. People with ME/CFS may not feel better even after a full night of sleep (e.g., feeling just as tired upon waking up as before going to bed).

In addition, **at least one** of the following symptoms is also required:

Impaired memory or ability to concentrate. People with ME/CFS may have trouble remembering, learning new things, concentrating, or making decisions.

Orthostatic intolerance (symptoms that occur when standing upright). People with ME/CFS may feel lightheaded or dizzy when standing upright and may even faint.

The list of key symptoms is drawn from an Institute of Medicine (IOM) report by an expert committee of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and published in 2015: [Beyond Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome: Redefining an Illness](#). You may experience some additional symptoms.

Only a healthcare provider can diagnose ME/CFS. A healthcare provider will ask about how often your symptoms occur and how much they affect you. Sometimes you may need to make more than one visit to a healthcare provider before being diagnosed. While not all healthcare providers are familiar with diagnosing ME/CFS, resources are available to help them make a diagnosis.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases

For more information on ME/CFS, please visit www.cdc.gov/me-cfs.

Patient Toolkit

ME/CFS educational tools to help patients and their families manage their healthcare visits.

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SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:
[National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases \(NCEZID\)](#)

SOURCES

- Disclaimer: This website is for informational purposes only. The information provided on this website is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

<https://www.cdc.gov/me-cfs/diagnosis/index.html>

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